

I N T E R N A T I O N A L  
**RECORD REVIEW**

FOR THE SERIOUS CLASSICAL COLLECTOR

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**Jacqueline  
du Pré**

The unreleased  
Elgar Cello Concerto

Alexander Kniazev  
Eloquence in Tchaikovsky

Ronald Stevenson  
Compels as pianist  
and composer

*Winterreise* on DVD  
Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau  
and Thomas Quasthoff

Bernstein's Mahler  
Newly minted on  
CD and DVD

Twentieth-century  
Violin Concertos



seems to lack the sheer volume that is required for the biggest climaxes, but also she appears short of breath for the huge and moving lines that are especially typical of the last song. Yet with both these shortcomings she could still have practised her unique vibrato-laden projection, but she chooses not to. Perhaps, as usual with disappointments, I am exaggerating her shortcomings, and those of the performance as a whole.

Only very dedicated followers of Giulini will buy the set for Mozart's penultimate symphony, which receives an extremely idiosyncratic though often illuminating reading, with the VPO playing with irresistible sweetness (the strings) and pungency when required (the woodwind). Speeds are slow, bearing scant relationship to Mozart's tempo indications, and that deprives the outer movements of their tragic anxiety. Instead we are given melancholy, warmth and, in the slow movement, gentle consolation. Much of Mozart's vision in this harrowing work is missing, but what we hear instead is very beautiful. **Michael Tanner**

### **Schubert Winterreise, D911.**

**Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau** (baritone);

**Alfred Brendel** (piano).

**TDK DVWWW-COWINT** (1 hour 13 minutes).

Includes rehearsal documentary (56 minutes). Subtitles in English/French/German/Italian/Spanish. *Website* www.tdk.com. 4:3. NTSC. DVD 9. Region 0. LPCM Stereo. *TV/Video Director* Klaus Lindemann. *DVD Producer* Horst Janos. *Date* Live performance at the Siemensvilla, Berlin in January 1979.

#### **Comparison:**

Fassbaender, Reimann (EMI) 7 49846-2 (1988)

Gottfried Kraus's informative booklet note with this DVD reminds us that Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau introduced his *Winterreise* at the age of 17 – in a performance interrupted by an air raid! By 1979 the baritone's decades of experience with the music had distilled his presentation to its absolute essentials. Aged 53, Fischer-Dieskau superbly husbands his resources while giving a demonstration of interpretative intelligence that should serve as a touchstone for all who attempt Schubert's daunting cycle in the future.

Almost completely eschewing physical gesture, Fischer-Dieskau uses face and voice to create his characterization: an earnest, open-hearted, dignified but sweetly melancholic figure (he tends to avoid the white-hot, agonized emotions of the sort heard from, say, the uniquely passionate Brigitte Fassbaender). The baritone makes his most pertinent expressive points mainly through intimacy, with an intensity of concentration that is second to none. His usual vivid rhythmic sense is evident from start to finish (how beautifully he articulates the opening song, 'Gute Nacht', not at all the wimpy/weepy treatment one hears so often). He is in fine voice, even if one hears a few patches of dry, somewhat wan tone here where formerly

he might have offered more velvet. What matters far more is his supreme command of vocal shading; listen, for example, to the nineteenth song, 'Täuschung', which reaches something as close to perfection as can be imagined in Fischer-Dieskau's coolly graceful performance. By way of contrast, in the final song, 'Der Leiermann', the most crucial line – 'Wunderlicher Alter, soll ich mit dir gehen?' – produces an unnerving, other-worldly colour utterly unlike anything he has brought to the other songs.

No partner ever related more directly to Fischer-Dieskau's own meticulous approach to song than did Alfred Brendel. The Austrian pianist's incomparable technique is never once ostentatiously displayed, although one is constantly grateful for it (listen to his precision in 'Die Wetterfahne' or his rippling contribution to 'Die Krähe'). What authority and responsiveness to mood Brendel brings to the whole enterprise! He sets a few tempos that other singers might find excessively brisk, but they invariably suit Fischer-Dieskau.

The performance is filmed with refreshing simplicity, the camera aptly and quietly fading out on Fischer-Dieskau, then fading up on Brendel, then turning back again to the singer. Appropriately, it concentrates on the face of Fischer-Dieskau, who fortunately is comfortable in close-up, with little of the grimacing that many German-trained singers seem to favour. Several songs communicate an apposite emotional numbness, and in 'Der Lindenbaum' the angelic facial expression is memorable. The duo performs *sans* audience but in concert attire at Berlin's Siemensvilla in boomy, almost churchy sound. Another small quibble: the titles of many of the songs appear on screen after the first line of text has already been shown.

TDK's bonus on the DVD is nearly an hour of rehearsal footage. The two artists' spoken exchanges are virtually inaudible often enough to make subtitles impossible, but even if one doesn't catch much of what is said, it is fascinating to hear the subtle changes that occur in the repetition of particular phrases. How invigorating it is to witness Fischer-Dieskau's desire to re-examine this work, after so many years of living with it. Such eagerness is an example to all Lieder singers, for whom this DVD should be required viewing – and listening! **Roger Pines**

### **Schubert Winterreise, D911.**

**Thomas Quasthoff** (baritone); **Daniel Barenboim** (piano).

**DG 073 4049** (1 hour 8 minutes). Includes rehearsal

footage and interviews with Thomas Quasthoff and Daniel Barenboim (15 minutes). Subtitles in Chinese/English/French/German/Spanish *Website* www.universalsclassics.com. NTSC. 16:9. Region 0. PCM Stereo. DTS 5.1. Dolby Digital 5.1. *DVD Director* Michael Beyer. *DVD Producer* Paul Smaczny. *Date* Live performance at the Philharmonie, Berlin on 22nd March, 2005.

Having set vocal standards in virtually all his repertoire, Thomas Quasthoff reaches a peak of achievement here. Certainly that mellow timbre can stand comparison with any Lieder baritone on disc, and Quasthoff, although more baritone than bass, does also possess welcome ease in the lower extremes. Quiet attacks and leaps to soft high notes give joy, legato invariably flows as beautifully as the best of Fischer-Dieskau, and the phrasing is often so achingly tender and delicate as to reduce the listener on several occasions to tears. Much of the music-making communicates with the directness and simplicity of folk-song, enhanced through pristine textual projection – listen to 'Der Lindenbaum', to name just one example. One doesn't quite get from Quasthoff a variety of inflexion to equal Fischer-Dieskau's on DG's *Winterreise* DVD, reviewed opposite (not that anyone else has achieved it either), but throughout one has the distinct – and treasurable – impression of an artist working from his innermost depths.

Daniel Barenboim responds to the music with the dexterity one expects of him, and even though he seems seldom to look up at Quasthoff in the performance, their 'connectedness' is complete. Where Brendel (with Fischer-Dieskau) chooses the small stick, Barenboim uses the large one, with the piano lid wide open. When at maximum power, as in 'Der stürmische Morgen', Barenboim comes dangerously close to covering Quasthoff, who must work at full strength. Even in the most vigorous music, however, the singer's tone remains attractive.

The DVD also shows the two in rehearsal and conversation. While treating each other with obvious respect and affection, they do not attack the songs with the same obsessive attention to detail that characterizes the Fischer-Dieskau/Brendel rehearsal footage. Each on his own, both Quasthoff and Barenboim offer sensible, straightforward comments, with Barenboim explaining the need for artists in this music to think creatively, particularly as regards textual colours. Interpretatively, Quasthoff, who views the cycle as a 'miniature opera', feels that it presents an 'open ending' with a glimmer of hope always present.

The camera moves in even closer on Quasthoff's face than it does on Fischer-Dieskau's. The younger singer's invariably apt expression – never exaggerated – is increasingly plaintive, youthful and vulnerable as the cycle proceeds. The booklet note indicates that much coughing occurred early in this March 2005 performance, but DG has somehow managed to mask it; indeed, the audience at Berlin's Philharmonie seems gratifyingly rapt. I have been present at a Quasthoff *Winterreise* performance in which his pianist's last chord was still sounding when the 'bravo's intruded. Fortunately, the Berlin public remains silent for several seconds, letting the final notes sink in. It takes a few



bows by the artists before a standing ovation materializes – eminently deserved, for a change. Barenboim is clearly much moved by his collaboration with Quasthoff, at one point stepping back to let the audience shower the singer with applause.

DG's sound is, as usual, excellent. No need to choose between this and Fischer-Dieskau's DVD – run, do not walk, to purchase both.

Roger Pines

### Wolf Lieder with Orchestra.

New

Mörike-Lieder – No. 6, Er ist's; No. 22, Seufzer; No. 23, Auf ein altes Bild; No. 24, In der Frühe; No. 25, Schlafendes Jesuskind; No. 26, Karwoche; No. 28, Gebet; No. 29, An den Schlaf; No. 30, Neue Liebe; No. 31, Wo find' ich Trost; No. 39, Denk es, O Seele!; No. 44, Der Feuerreiter<sup>a</sup>; No. 46, Gesang Weylas. Spanisches Liederbuch – No. 12, In dem Schatten meiner Locken; No. 16, Wenn du zu den Blumen gehst; No. 17, Wer sein holdes Lieb verloren; No. 21, Herz, verzage nicht geschwind. Goethe-Lieder – No. 1, Harfenspieler I; No. 2, Harfenspieler II; No. 3, Harfenspieler III; No. 9, Mignon; No. 11, Der Rattenfänger; No. 29, Anacreons Grab; No. 49, Prometheus.

Juliane Banse (soprano); Dietrich Henschel (baritone); <sup>a</sup>Berlin Radio Choir; Deutsche Symphony Orchestra/Kent Nagano.

Harmonia Mundi HMC901837 (full price, 1 hour 9 minutes). German texts and English/French translations included. Website www.harmoniamundi.com. Producer Martin Sauer. Engineers René Möller, Tobias Lehmann. Dates November 2003, December 2004.

#### Comparison:

Mörike Lieder:

Güra, Schultz (Harmonia Mundi) HMC901882 (2004, rev. Dec 2005)

Hugo Wolf orchestrated 24 of his songs, all of which are included on Harmonia Mundi's disc. As anyone can attest who has heard Seefried/Werba, Fischer-Dieskau/Moore and other great singer/pianist duos in this music, the songs don't invariably cry out for the supposed enhancement presented by orchestration. Still, many of these versions do give pleasure, and a varied sampling would make a refreshing concert alternative for a soloist accustomed to singing Mahler or Strauss.

If a large number of these songs are emotionally supercharged with piano, imagine them triply so with orchestra. When listened to straight through, the CD becomes exhausting – it's definitely best when savoured a few songs at a time. Certainly on several occasions (try 'Mignon', for example), one is very much aware that Wolf does not pale beside the finest composers in this genre – Mahler, Strauss, Grieg, Sibelius *et al.* The songs are exceedingly varied in their instrumental forces, with

'Der Feuerreiter' probably the most large-scale of all and 'Auf ein altes Bild' (written for woodwind sextet) the smallest.

Among the songs given excessive grandeur are 'Denk es, o Seele!', 'Neue Liebe' (*Parsifal*, anyone?), 'Seufzer', 'Wer sein holdes Lieb verloren' and 'Prometheus'. I much prefer 'Gebet', which seems simultaneously to look backward to, say, *Lohengrin* and forward to the Strauss of 'Befreit'. One is frequently struck by ravishing wind-writing, as in the clarinet passages that colour 'Schlafendes Jesuskind'. That song, with its orchestral fabric cushioning the voice marvellously, rivals 'Gesang Weylas' and 'Wenn du zu den Blumen gehst' for sheer loveliness of sound. Truly exhilarating is 'Der Rattenfänger', which orchestrally seems to anticipate Strauss's *Till Eulenspiegel* (composed four years later) at its most hectic.

Dietrich Henschel gets the lion's share of the songs, and one need only hear the heartfelt expressiveness of 'Harfenspieler I' to sense a most distinguished artist at work. Barring some slight pushing when loud and high, his Fischer-Dieskau-like sound has a virile strength and is managed with consistent intelligence. Henschel's colouristic resources are terrific (try the biting sarcasm of 'Herz, verzage nicht geschwind' or the white, dreamy tone that opens 'An den Schlaf'). Such a gift for shading isn't really present with Juliane Banse, who possesses an unusually dark timbre for a light soprano; the lower octave often seems lyric mezzo-ish, descending comfortably below middle C in 'Mignon', but the top can turn hard. Banse does offer admirable musicianship and, when the songs truly suit her ('Schlafendes Jesuskind', 'Anacreons Grab'), she makes a lovely effect. I wouldn't have thought 'Er ist's' right for her voice, but she proves unexpectedly persuasive in that effervescent song.

The Berlin Radio Chorus has the measure of Wolf's noisy choral version of 'Der Feuerreiter'. I would easily trade that, however, for tenor Werner Güra's spectacular new recording, which I reviewed in December. The Deutsche Symphony Orchestra, by turns soulful and brash, gives the singers sterling support under Kent Nagano, its artistic director. Harmonia Mundi includes texts and translations and a helpful essay by Habakuk Traber, while also providing ideally spacious recorded sound.

Roger Pines

### Christine Rice

New

Brahms Acht Zigeunerlieder, Op. 103. Duparc Extase. Manoir de Rosemonde. La vie antérieure. L'Invitation au voyage. Handel Ariodante – Dopo notte. Rinaldo – Cara sposa; Venti, turbini. Howells Four Songs, Op. 22. King David. Wolf Mörike-Lieder – No. 8, Begegnung; No. 12, Verborgenheit; No. 24, In der Frühe; No. 27, Zum neuen Jahr; No. 39, Denk es, o Seele!; No. 52, Selbstgespräch.

Christine Rice (mezzo); Roger Vignoles (piano). EMI Debut 3 30466-2 (medium price, 1 hour 14 minutes). Website www.emiclassics.com. Producer John Fraser. Engineer Arne Akselberg. Dates July 2005.

This is no carefully planned CD recital that leads us step by step through a programme, but rather a musical calling-card from one of the current BBC New Generation Artists. But who's complaining when it's delivered by so assured an artist as Christine Rice? Admirably supported by the ever-attentive Roger Vignoles, Rice shines in repertoire that really does show this young mezzo-soprano to best advantage. Indeed, the only possible complaint is that EMI have not thought fit to provide texts for the songs in the accompanying booklet.

Rice's Handel is brilliant in style and tone but tender too. So she throws off 'Dopo notte' from *Ariodante* fearlessly, jumping octaves with the greatest of ease and producing a thrilling finish to the aria that pulls you up short. When it comes to conveying Handel's absolute instinct for the movements of the human heart, she really has the measure of the man and the musician. In 'Cara sposa' from *Rinaldo* there's a finely spun legato that's both emotionally and musically right. Any temptation to become maudlin is firmly resisted and in the fast middle section she is as nimble as she is feeling in the rest of the aria.

Hot on the heels of Handel come Brahms's eight *Zigeunerlieder*, stamping their gypsy feet just to prove what Rice can do. The voice changes colour and there's a kind of Slav throb and slides through the chest register that seems to have come straight from what we imagine the music of the great Hungarian Plain sounds like. And Rice relishes the succulent melody that Brahms wraps around 'Kommt dir manchmal in der Sinn, meines süßes Lieb'. Here and in all the other seven songs her phrasing and diction are exemplary.

Six of Wolf's *Mörike-Lieder* and four *mélodies* by Duparc, including *Extase* and *L'invitation au voyage*, throw down a much sterner gauntlet. Rice responds to the challenge well enough and Vignoles is ever alert to both composers' nuanced piano writing, for example, that wayward chromatic phrase that threads through Wolf's 'Denk es, o Seele!'. But somehow Rice is not yet quite inside this music. Wolf and Duparc demand experience and technique. However, the intensity that she brings to the last page of 'Verborgenheit' and the soft controlled singing throughout *Extase* promise much more to come.

And so, home to Herbert Howells! English Howells and locally folkish in his *Four Songs*, Op. 22. A personal indulgence by a singer who hopes to reclaim an audience for a favourite composer, you may think. But listen to a fifth song, to Howells's setting of Walter de la Mare's *King David*. Rice makes it into something very special, which is surely the measure of true artistry, to make us hear anew music that we may have overlooked.

Christopher Cook